

Applications open for Design Innovation Seed Fund

Applications are now open for the Design Innovation Seed Fund (DISF). Western Cape-based designers, inventors, entrepreneurs and product developers with pre-revenue innovations can apply for grant funding of up to R800,000.



Lauren Drake, founder of EveryChild

The DISF is a project of the Craft and Design Institute (CDI) with investment funds provided by the Technology Innovation Agency (TIA). The DISF is managed by CDI Capital, which was incorporated as a CDI subsidiary in 2016 to catalyse funding for SMEs.

The DISF funds designers, inventors, entrepreneurs and product developers with pre-revenue innovative technologies and tech-enabled ideas and products. These individuals/businesses are not able to raise funds easily from traditional banks or funding agencies because of the high risk associated with early-stage innovation.

The seed funding assists recipients to understand their opportunities by designing and building prototypes, and validating their assumptions around the technical and market-related challenges.

Applications that support innovative products and services are welcome from a wide range of sectors including agri-processing; biotechnology and health; construction; advanced manufacturing technology; information, communication technology; and software engineering (data analytics, machine learning, artificial intelligence, etc.)

Since 2014, the DISF has contracted R17.7m in grants to support local design innovation. The seed funding provided through CDI Capital helped the businesses secure an additional R22.5m in funding.

“We have seen some fantastic, cutting-edge technology-driven innovations emerge from South Africa thanks to the funding we have made available. This new round of grant funding is an enormous opportunity for the next set of local break-through ideas to become a reality,” says Erica Elk, Group CEO at the CDI.

“We have put a significant amount of work into the grant offering, not only ensuring good governance and appropriate monitoring and evaluation measures but also realising real and sustainable impact with the businesses we support.”

Success stories

The founder of EveryChild, Lauren Drake, said the funding helped them with implementing a pilot phase to test their model assumptions in the real world.

EveryChild is a mobile application which empowers South African township daycare centres to run fund-raising campaigns by leveraging their families' need for FMCG products. The service provides the customer with monthly FMCG product combinations which, when purchased together, provide a cash-back to the customer e-wallet and a contribution to the daycare centres.

When Drake applied for the DISF grant funding, she needed to ensure that the design of the platform was optimised to be relevant and impactful for our beneficiaries. “These were critical aspects that the DISF fund was able to support us with,” she said.

Giving advice to other applicants, Drake says, “I can’t understate how important it was for us to be given the opportunity to test our concept and assumptions in the field with beneficiaries before starting the development of the product. We gathered invaluable learnings upfront which resulted in a significant saving in development cost down the line,” she concluded.

Vula Mobile is a Cape Town-based technology startup – it is a professional medical network which aims to improve healthcare by linking registered health workers with specialists via specialised apps and an online dashboard.

The objective is to develop a robust, automated and secure registration process for health workers both in South Africa and internationally.

The business was started by Dr William Mapham, who conceived the idea for the app while working at the Vula Emehlo Eye Clinic in rural Swaziland. He experienced first-hand the difficulties faced by rural health workers when they need specialist advice.

Dr Mapham said the DISF helped his company during a critical stage. “CDI helped fund the development of our technology that will help us offer Vula Mobile to health workers across the globe.” His advice to local innovators is to speak to as many people as possible. “South Africa is a social nation and we love to help each other. You will be surprised at how just by asking people will offer you support,” he concluded.

Apply now

Applications will close at 5pm on 17 April 2020.

Applicants are encouraged to read the application guidelines prior to sending their applications. Incomplete applications will not be considered.

For more information and to apply, go to <https://cdicapital.co.za/disf/>

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